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DEPARTMENT FOR H: PLEASE PASS TO HPSCI PSM JAMES LEWIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [ENRG](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: REP. HOEKSTRA'S APRIL 3 MEETING WITH PARLIAMENT'S  
LEADERSHIP

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In an April 3 meeting with Representative Hoekstra, the Azerbaijani Parliamentary leadership expressed its desire to build relationships with the U.S. Congress. Speaker Ogtay Asadov noted particular concern that Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act remains on the books, and that Azerbaijan - unlike Georgia and Armenia - has been determined ineligible for Millennium Challenge Corporation funding. Asadov said that he was concerned by the number of pro-Armenian Democrats in the U.S. Congress, and that some of their initiatives cause Azerbaijanis to worry. He said that Parliament "regrets" Congress' decision to block U.S. funding of the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway project. According to Asadov, the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains the biggest obstacle to Azerbaijan's continued progress; he said the GOAJ would like to see "increased U.S. efforts" to resolve the conflict. Representative Hoekstra said that he would encourage more U.S. Congressmen to visit Azerbaijan. Representative Hoekstra's visit provided some of the interaction with Congress that the Azerbaijani Parliament has been requesting; we would welcome other Congressional visitors, particularly the American members of the U.S.-Azerbaijan Inter-Parliamentary Working Group. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On April 3, Representative Hoekstra and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Professional Staff Member James Lewis met with the Azerbaijani Parliamentary leadership. Azerbaijani attendees included Speaker of Parliament Ogtay Asadov; Deputy Speakers Valeh Alasgarov and Bahar Muradova; First Deputy Speaker Ziyafat Asgarov; Chair of the International Relations Commission Samad Seyidov; Parliamentary Chief of Staff Safa Mirzoyev; and Aide to the Speaker Ruslan Ismayilov. The Speaker opened the meeting by welcoming the delegation to Azerbaijan and pleading for more extensive and active contacts between the Azerbaijani Parliament and the U.S. Congress. He emphasized that Azerbaijan has been a reliable partner in the War on Terror and in energy, listing as an example the energy MOU signed during Foreign Minister Mammadyarov's recent trip to Washington.

¶3. (C) Asadov expressed serious concern that Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act remains on the books, although he noted his gratitude that President Bush has waived it for the past five years. According to Asadov, a permanent waiver would create the conditions necessary for a stronger bilateral relationship. The Speaker also noted concern that Azerbaijan does not qualify to receive assistance from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which he views as biased because Armenia and Georgia have received MCC funding. Asadov said that Parliament's leadership appreciates U.S. support in all sectors, especially with assistance developing the BTC pipeline, but that they "regret" Congress' decision to block U.S. financing of the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku

railway project. According to Asadov, the biggest obstacle to Azerbaijan's continued progress is the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the GOAJ would like to see "increased U.S. efforts" to resolve the conflict.

¶4. (C) Representative Hoekstra said that Congress is more than willing to work with the Azerbaijani Parliament to help it develop as a strong institution, adding that he would encourage more Congressmen to visit and learn more about Azerbaijan. He noted that the USG greatly appreciates Azerbaijan's partnership in the War on Terror, and said that it is important for Congress to review the relationship and perhaps reconsider legislation like Section 907. The Speaker said that while Azerbaijan has rich natural resources, Armenia does not; "its only resource is the Armenian diaspora." According to Asadov, most Armenians would like to find a solution to the N-K conflict, but the power remains "in the hands of terrorists."

¶5. (C) The Speaker said that he was concerned by the number of pro-Armenian Democrats in the U.S. Congress, and that some of their initiatives - like pushing for recognition of the 1915 events in Turkey as "genocide" - cause Azerbaijanis to worry. Asadov explained that the influence of the Armenian lobby on Congress is one reason that the Azerbaijani Parliament wants stronger inter-parliamentary relations with the U.S., so that "external forces" cannot influence the bilateral relationship. According to Asadov, Armenia is trying to establish another Armenian state on Azerbaijani soil to pursue its quest for a "Greater Armenia" that stretches from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea. The Speaker made several negative comments and jokes about Armenia and the Armenian lobby, and said that he was happy to see that the delegation has not visited Armenia. Representative

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Hoekstra noted that it was not his intention to be "better friends" with either Azerbaijan or Armenia; rather, he wanted a better understanding of the overall situation.

¶6. (C) Asadov told Representative Hoekstra that Azerbaijan's top foreign policy is Euro-Atlantic integration. He said that Parliament plays an important role in this integration, which is why Parliament's Deputy Speakers lead Azerbaijan's delegation to NATO and to the OSCE. Representative Hoekstra noted that international travel is important for Congress; he said that it is unfortunate that some Congressmen take pride in not having passports. He said that although sometimes the U.S. Congress' decisions do not resound well internationally, they are important for U.S. domestic policy. Representative Hoekstra concluded that more interaction between the Azerbaijani Parliament and the U.S. Congress will result in a better understanding of the potential benefits of a stronger bilateral relationship, and he noted that Congress' current leadership would likely be pleased to host a delegation of Azerbaijani parliamentarians.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The Speaker made many more negative references to Armenia and the Armenian lobby in this meeting than he has in past meetings; his statements reflect a growing worry among Azerbaijani officials that changing U.S. domestic politics could result in a change in U.S. foreign policy toward Azerbaijan. Congressional visits such as Representative Hoekstra's help allay these concerns and also provide some of the inter-parliamentary interaction that the Azerbaijani Parliament has been requesting. The Embassy would welcome other Congressional visitors to Baku, especially the American members of the U.S.-Azerbaijan Inter-Parliamentary Working Group.

¶8. (U) Representative Hoekstra did not clear this message.  
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